

LESSON 1D—NARRATIVE: WHY DO WE PRESERVE AND PROTECT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES?

Many families record events and celebrations with photographs. The photos show what family members looked like through time. If the photos are lost or destroyed, the record of the family changes. The events remain in people's memories, but the objects describing those memories—the photographs—are gone forever. A future archaeologist would have difficulty interpreting your past if artifacts have vanished.

The same difficulty applies to an archaeological site and its record. The position and location in which artifacts are found provide clues for an archaeologist. If the objects are destroyed or missing, or if the artifacts are disturbed or mixed up, the archaeologist will find it difficult to determine the story of the site. The place where an artifact was left by prehistoric people, and that position in relationship to other artifacts in the site, is known as **context**. Context is vital during archaeological research. Context provides solid clues for site reconstruction. If the context is disturbed, important evidence about the past is forever lost. Context may be disturbed accidentally or intentionally by humans, or by natural occurrences.

All pieces of the puzzle are necessary for interpretation and reconstruction of the past. Context assists archaeologists in dating a site, and in determining the activities that took place there. Scientists can learn about the plants and animals eaten by people of long ago. And they can verify in which season of

Preserving and protecting archaeological sites provides information for future generations.

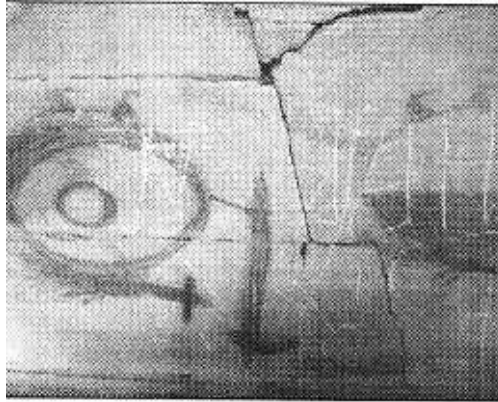
the year the ancient people consumed these foods. Archaeologists even discover how long a site was **inhabited**, or lived in, by studying context.

If a site is disturbed or destroyed before archaeologists can make proper records, valuable information is lost. A site can not be re-created once artifacts have been disrupted. Archaeological sites are fragile, **non-renewable resources**. It is extremely important to leave a site as it exists, unless you are prepared professionally to take responsibility for recording it properly.

If you have ever lost something special, you know that you felt sad about the loss. Archaeologists experience the same feeling if a site is destroyed. Knowledge and understanding of the past—the most important things archaeologists learn from a site—are lost forever. Many artifacts are very beautiful and are valued for their artistic qualities. Some people steal these items from archaeological sites and sell them. These **pothunters**, or people who only dig for pretty artifacts like whole pots, take away our chance to gain awareness of the past. They rob us of our past. Other people **vandalize** sites and destroy them for no reason. In addition to vandals and pothunters, other circumstances threaten archaeological sites. A new housing development may disturb an ancient campsite. Other threats may be construction of shopping malls or oil and gas pipelines. A farmer tilling a new field may disturb artifacts. Progress and growth in our civilization

Right: Prehistoric artifacts are sometimes bought and sold along with other Native American craft items. However, without their context, artifacts lose their meaning and significance to archaeology.

Below: Modern vandals scratched their initials over this ancient rock art in Fergus County, Montana. Acts of vandalism can destroy archaeological sites. *Courtesy Montana State Historic Preservation Office.*



threaten archaeological sites daily. We lose knowledge of the past any time a site is improperly dug or disturbed.

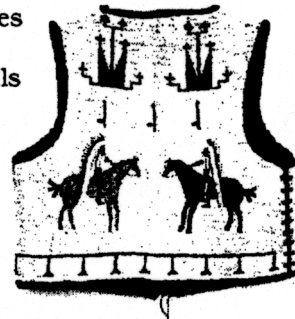
Laws are written to preserve and protect archaeological sites. The first law passed in the United States that protected sites was the **Antiquities Act of 1906**. The Antiquities Act makes it illegal for people to disturb archaeological sites on federal **public land**—land that belongs to the federal government—without special permission from the government. The **Montana State Antiquities Act**, passed in the 1970s, protects archaeological and historical sites on state-owned property. These laws also allow the police to arrest pothunters and fine them for **looting**, or illegally taking artifacts away from, sites. These and other federal and state laws protect and preserve the archaeological past

Wanted American Indian Artifacts

Whole Collections or single pieces

We Need:

- Beaded pieces
- Rugs
- Kachina Dolls
- Baskets
- Jewelry
- Weapons
- Art work
- Pottery
- Arrowheads
- Stone relics
- Old or new



Send Photos or call Steve at

Auctions Since 1967

"We sell more Indian items than anyone in the world!"

on public lands for future generations.

Archaeological sites and artifacts are messengers from the past. If we know how to read the messages, artifacts tell us much about people of long ago. The people who lived on a site may have been there hundreds, or even thousands, of years ago. All cultures, modern or ancient, contain value for our society.

The past is our **legacy**, a gift passed down to us by those who first inhabited this land. Our connections to the past are strong. And all Montanans deserve an opportunity to know about the people who were here before us. You are a caretaker, or **steward**, of our **heritage**, which includes the traces of Montana's early peoples that lie buried in our landscape. Protect and preserve the past for present and future generations.

LESSON 1D—VOCABULARY: WHY DO WE PRESERVE AND PROTECT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES?

context _____

heritage _____

inhabited _____

laws _____

legacy _____

looting _____

Montana State Antiquities Act _____

nonrenewable _____

public land _____

steward _____

vandalism/pothunters _____

LESSON 1D—ARCH ACTIVITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PAST

Grades: 3–8

Time: 40 minutes

Content Area: history and writing

Who: whole class and small group

Materials:

2 photos of family activities

writing tools

Arch Journals

Some people say that a photograph is worth a thousand words. . . .
*Courtesy K. C. Smith,
Museum of Florida
History, Tallahassee.*



OBJECTIVE AND OUTCOME

- Students will identify the importance of their family's past and compare it with the archaeological past.
- Students will write sentences about the importance of the past.

ACTIVITY

1. Prior to the activity, instruct students to bring two photographs representing an important family event, for example a family reunion, or a vacation, or a graduation party. Ask them to think about the picture's significance.

2. Divide the class into groups of four. Each student is a writer and a presenter. Instruct students to discuss their photos and their importance within the group. Allow up to 10 minutes.

3. Instruct students to trade photos with another group. Make sure all groups have traded. Next, each group should determine the meaning and significance of the other group's pictures. Each member will write sentences explaining the importance of one photo. Allow up to 10 minutes.

4. Each member then presents the

conclusions to the whole class. Ask them to explain clues from the picture that helped identify what that importance was. Ask the owner of the photo if the conclusions are correct and to add information.

5. Pass photos back to the owner. Instruct each student to answer these questions in their Arch Journal (write questions on board or overhead):

- ~ Why is it important to know about your past?
- ~ Why is it important to learn about the archaeological past?
- ~ What can we learn by studying the past?
- ~ What happens if special items from the past are destroyed?

EXTENSIONS

3–5:

- Research vocabulary.

See: Lesson 1D—Vocabulary

- Have students write a story about an event or a special object from their past. Place a twist in the story when the event or object disappears.

6–8:

- Have students research other cultures. Look for similarities and differences between their culture and the others. Ideas for research include types of foods eaten, family organization, and types of shelters.